

# I CROSSROADS A Q'S

by Tech. Sgt. Jason Tudor  
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***Deploying  
to Baghdad  
means  
moving  
a whole  
lot of  
passengers  
and cargo***

**W**hen an Airman mentions he's been "outside the wire" in Iraq, that usually raises eyebrows. It's a little like telling someone you've "pressed carpet" inside the White House. It's simply not done.

Few Airmen assigned at Sather Air Base, Baghdad, Iraq, will ever experience what life is like outside the wire — but on their tour to Sather, they will be moving passengers and cargo to points all over the Iraqi theater.

Since May, the 447th Air Expeditionary Group here has done just that: 5,000 missions, 24,000 tons of cargo and 148,000 boots on the ground or returning home.

"We do passengers and cargo," said Col. Dan Kornacki, the group's commander. "We get people into Iraq and on their way to the mission. That's the heart of what we do."

Someone checking for that heartbeat will only need to press their ear to the flightline. It's found inside the Camp Victory complex across from Baghdad International Airport on the southwest side of the city. There, the buzz of HH-60 helicopters, C-130s from five different countries, C-17s and a myriad of other aircraft are touching down, mostly at night.

*Senior Airman Nathan Simmons, left, and Staff Sgt. Johnathan Baker watch troops and cargo load onto a British C-130J which took off despite white-out conditions that halted flightline activity at Baghdad International Airport. Airman Simmons, an active-duty KC-135 crew chief from McConnell Air Force Base, Kan., and Sergeant Baker, an Air Force Reserve C-17 crew chief from Charleston Air Force Base, S.C., are assigned to the 447th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron in Baghdad.*







Almost all of them will make a stop at Sather's aerial port, where 1st Lt. Jennifer Kennedy's team will greet them. Along with the U.S. military, other countries and civilian contractors work to keep the port and passengers moving.

"The biggest customer we have here is the Army. That's our primary mission — to get them in and out of here," she said. "The Brits and the Aussies also have people stationed here. They get

two to three aircraft per day."

Captured enemies also stop here before being moved to one of two camps in country, including Abu Ghraib prison. It's a process overseen by security forces troops — who serve along side Soldiers — guarding more than 7,000 detainees so far.

"There is no more noble character than the American Soldier or an Airman who is fighting for democratic freedom in the world,"

said Army Col. Jim Brown, 18th Military Police Brigade commander, when he presented 126 combat patches to the Air Force security forces. "They do so in the knowledge that democratic security is not just the best form of security for our allies, our friends and our Iraqi partners today in Iraq, but also the best form of security for America herself."

**VIP's daily**

But there's more to Sather than pallets, people and prisoner movement. Almost daily, there is a VIP on the doorstep. The guest list includes the secretary of defense, attorney general and secretary of state. It also includes prime ministers and politicians from coalition countries as well as a litany of support people who work to continue the process for democracy in Iraq.

Most VIPs pass through the group's headquarters building. Dubbed the "Glass House" for its ornate rooftop mosaics of mirrors, the building formerly served as Saddam Hussein's personal military terminal. One day, the British prime minister bumped into the attorney general of the United States. That's not

the start of a joke. It happened. Colonel Kornacki was there.

"When he introduced himself as 'the attorney general of the United States,' I just went, 'Wham!' This is the guy! That's when it was the most significant for me," the colonel said.

**Quality of life**

The group also deals with adversity. A storm almost wiped the camp off the sands of Baghdad, and civil engineers are replacing 120 tents with more modern "Alaska" style tents. The difference?

"The new tents stay cooler and offer more space," said Senior Airman Aaron Nichols. He took charge of the \$4 million project with a handful of Airmen, and he hopes to have all the tents done before his rotation ends.

"Working hard makes the time go by faster," he said.

While the tents provide shelter, the vital medical mission keeps people safe. The 447th Expeditionary Medical Squadron is a first stop for many needing medical aid, including Soldiers, Marines and Sailors.

They recently treated a spider bite, a broken arm, a gunshot wound to the hand and an Iraqi Special Forces soldier shot in the side. Those that cannot completely heal here are flown out on an HH-60 helicopter to a contingency hospital in Balad.

Meanwhile, many Airmen are experiencing their first deployment. They're learning what a 200-foot walk to the shower, a 50-foot walk to the bathroom and 125-degree days are like.

Senior Airman Doreen Prasad flew 5,121 miles to get to Iraq from her home station in Japan. By Air Force specialty,



*(Clockwise from top left) UH-60 Blackhawk Flight Medic Army Specialist Michael Bishop, left, receives medical treatment instructions from Tech. Sgt. J.B. Moody before he loads his patient, Army Specialist Cedric Johnson, aboard a helicopter to take him for further treatment, while Medical Technician Senior Airman Eric Dole readies the transport litter that holds the patient with a severely fractured forearm; Tech. Sgt. Brian McWaters, deployed to Baghdad from Kadena Air Base, Japan, referees an Army/Air Force game of flag football; Tech. Sgt. Dan Olds peers through the window of a 60-K loader while Guardsmen unload supplies from a C-17. Sergeant Olds, an Air Force reservist, is from Peterson Air Force Base, Colo.*







*Within 10 minutes of arriving at Sather Air Base, Iraq, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and his entourage are given an aerial convoy by UH-60 Blackhawks and AH-64 Apache helicopters.*

she works in public health. For her tour here, however, she's escorting third-country nationals — a sort of watch-dog job. Just because she's not doing her regular job, doesn't mean there's no reason to be concerned, she said.

"It's been a great deployment," said the Fiji native assigned to Air and Space Expeditionary Force 5/6. "The key is to have a good attitude and understand there are all kinds of people with different personalities."

Also important — finding ways to pass the time. There are enough guitar players walking around Sather to form a band the size of the

Gypsy Kings. Many Airmen play video games, watch movies, work out or attend one of many chapel activities.

For most of the 750 Airmen here, most believe there's no need to impress someone by saying you've been "outside the wire." The real rush is ensuring passengers and cargo reach their final destinations, whether that is at home or in theater.

"We have an evolving mission with the war on terrorism and the transformation of our role here to the Iraqi government and the Iraqi military," Colonel Kornacki said. "What we do is both important and relevant." 🦅

# Air Force in Iraq

Aside from the team at Sather, the military landscape in Iraq includes three major Air Force missions supporting Central Command's effort. They include:

- 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing, Balad Air Base. Primary airpower and logistics hub in Iraq. F-16 Fighting Falcon, Predator and HH-60 aircraft assigned. Operates Air Force theater hospital and provides inter- and intratheater aeromedical evacuation flights and aerial port operations. Provides airspace control for all of Iraq. Oversight of Air Force personnel directly supporting Army shortfall

requirements. Located 42 miles north of Baghdad.

- 407th Air Expeditionary Group, Ali Base. Ali Base, which is located near the town of An Nasiriyah, is home to the 407th Air Expeditionary Group, and is the U.S. Air Force's only major airfield in southern Iraq. The group operates C-130 Hercules and trains more than 100 Iraqi Air Force members how to maintain and fly C-130s. Ali Base's more than 1,100 Airmen reside on Logistical Support Area Camp Adder, which is home to the U.S. Army's 122th Support Group, and houses 3,500 sister ser-



vicemembers and 3,300 coalition forces.

- 506th Air Expeditionary Group, Kirkuk Air Base. Located in Kirkuk, Iraq. Group provides support for more than 3,000 Soldiers and contractors. Provides logistical support for Iraqi pipeline surveillance. Trains Iraqi fighter pilots and firefighters.

Airmen are also providing a wealth of support to Central Command in a variety of roles in Iraq and outside the country.



*Airman 1st Class Steven Ledwich, 97th Security Forces Squadron, mans a .50-caliber machine gun to provide perimeter security to more than 30 Soldiers who are transferring detainees from buses to a U.S. C-130 Hercules. Airman Ledwich deployed from Altus Air Force Base, Okla.*